

## **Euro 2008 in Geneva: A city's experience organizing a large-scale event Examining "friendly" fan and hooligan behaviour in the Fan Zone**

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Large-scale events like the 2008 UEFA European Football Championship (commonly referred to as the Euro) put a great deal of strain on the cities that host them, forcing them to find a provisional balance between the pursuit of everyday activities and the activities and persons involved in the event. Such events put a particular strain on cities because they tend to overstep the boundaries of a simple event involving specific actors (organizers and spectators) and well-defined limits. In fact, the organizing of major sporting events can be seen as the process of temporarily *reorganizing* an entire city. As such, this means reorganizing collective life on a citywide scale to better respond to issues at the social, economic, and operational levels. The key is conciliating the order of the event (the factors that determine its success economically, security-wise, and as a celebration) and that of the city. In this article we will explore the impact of the 2008 Euro on Geneva, its host-city, based on collective research done on this case study. By 'impact' we do not in this case mean a balance sheet of the Euro's fiscal benefits or a statistical accounting of transactions. Rather we will focus our attention on how the city reorganized itself at different levels in order to host the event. Simultaneous to reflection on Geneva's transformation as a receptacle for this sporting event, we will also look at how the city was used based on our observations of the supporters.

### **I. A city put to the test: confronting the issues surrounding the event**

Overall, the event's impact can be summed up by the idea of "a city put to the test" (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991; Heinich, 1999). The test itself is multi-faceted, affecting the preparation as well as the execution of the sporting event, both of which put the city's reputation, operational order (its adaptability), and social order (i.e. its hospitality) on the line. The city can be seen as a place that strives to create common ground from heterogeneous elements and scales. In this respect large-scale public events, as we have already suggested, increase the city's heterogeneity by temporarily forcing the drafting a new common order. The city's order is weakened at every level—from daily routines to the scheduling of its mobility. By focusing as such on the testing and recomposition that happens during large-scale events, we begin to see all of the practical and conventional apparatuses that enable the city's ordering emerge from the fray.

This testing (which, in fact, is two-fold) has both a quantitative and a qualitative component. To begin, the city—suddenly forced to deal with tens of thousands of additional users—must nonetheless maintain a functional framework, enabling the continuation of everyday activities to the greatest extent possible in spite of this influx; at the same time, it must permit those coming in from the outside to become part of the city's social and practical order (eating, sleeping, getting around, consuming, etc.). Thus the city must recompose a temporary, common agenda that satisfies a diversity of concurrent demands, and for this it must be able to simultaneously coordinate different entities—human or otherwise. In other words, it is necessary to set up original structures that will allow for the governance of

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diverse behaviours, leading to the constitution of a common order (the event's success, the pursuit of vital activities, respect for inhabitants, etc.). Secondly, sporting events have a qualitative test linked this time *not* to the mass of spectators that must be managed, but to the *state* in which they find themselves (outraged, overjoyed, inebriated, intoxicated, etc.). Sporting events instigate partisan involvement, inciting emotional registers that fall outside of the normal framework of expected public behaviour. Among the principal characteristics of behaviour in public spaces in European and North American cities, we find everything from relative emotional neutrality to flamboyant signs of national belonging, and everything in between. We expect a certain restraint from passers-by—a civil indifference (Goffman, 1974) towards other passers-by. This restraint contributes to the efficiency of public spaces, designed as anonymous and accessible to all. During sporting events, fan behaviour breaks to a certain degree from these expectations. As we can easily observe, the city is adorned with flags and alive with colourful fans brazenly manifesting support for their team for all to see. Public spaces thus become less anonymous—the setting for different points of encounter, friendly interpolation, and even occasional friction between fans.

More generally, the testing that goes on behind these transformations measures a city's capacity to temporarily make room for unusually passionate expressions of involvement. These emotions, which are likely to upset law and order by inciting confrontation or emotional outbursts, require channelling. This is where the testing comes in. Emotions cannot be eliminated, nor can fans be silenced. Nor can emotional outbursts be impeded. Rather, the point is to welcome *all* of these expressions to the greatest extent possible, as they too contribute to the event's success. Without supporter enthusiasm and fervour, the event loses its appeal in terms of the ambiance it offers as well as financially. At the same time, the emergence and movement of strong collective emotions—the euphoria of victory, the disappointment or even rage of defeat—give rise to outbursts that must be contained without necessarily being repressed. An essential part of a police officer's work in ensuring that an event goes off smoothly has precisely to do with this straddling of control and freedom; individuals and crowds must be welcomed and guided through out of the ordinary conditions that greatly differ from the predictable, planned behaviour of the city's habitual users.

## **II. Preparing for the event: the host city as a framework for practices**

### **1. Planning the event at the citywide scale: governing behaviour**

As we mentioned, it is important to see the event *not* as isolated in time and space but rather as a larger context requiring a temporary recomposition of the city's order—an order that must accommodate a larger population, new demands, and sometimes unpredictable entities (November, 2008). Once we start looking at the operations that are critical to the success of the event at the citywide scale, we begin to see that much its managing plays out around the conventional mechanisms for regulating urban order (mobility flows, lodging, etc.). These mechanisms, of course, originate from the event and rely on political and legal city planning instruments. This recomposition presumes veritable work on behaviour by the government (Foucault, 1986), that is, the orientation and coordination of the behaviours of all those participating in the event directly or indirectly. The government has a spatial horizon that requires distributing people and activities throughout the territory and then guiding their practical movement using a variety of material devices and a normative horizon that defines expected behaviour. The organization of things and people must be analyzed in close link with our conception of “proper order”, meaning, in the latter case, qualities we wish to attribute to the organization of the city.

In Geneva the threat of hooliganism—reinforced by the events of anti-G8 demonstrations in

2003—forced Euro 2008 organizers (the UEFA as well as the local actors charged with organizing and security) to include a strong element of security, inspired by the trend begun in English stadiums in the 1990s: a thorough pat-down at the entrance areas of the premises, the presence of surveillance cameras and plain-clothed police officers on the lookout for potential hooligans, and a ban on the sale of unauthorized alcoholic beverages within the confines of the stadium and surrounding areas. The strictness of security measures in and around the stadium was not, however, intended to hamper the makings of a festive ambiance during the event. Hand in hand with the desire to protect fans from dangerous individuals was the desire to welcome spectators with a celebratory spirit. Thus, measures were taken before the competition, most notably in the setting-up of three structures—all free of charge and meant first and foremost to serve as sites of celebration—to welcome fans. On the edge of the forest, the Fan Village offered among other things a giant screen that televised the matches and a stage that hosted more than 50 artists during the competition, while Fan Club, a free night club set up to welcome fans coming from the matches, offered entertainment until the wee hours of the morning. Finally the Fan Zone, a viewing area with two giant screens at Plainpalais field that could host up to 40,000 persons, was the main fan welcome area.

## **2. Fan Zone: a space of freedom and social control**

This new organization of practices materializes in particular in the “channelling” of crowds of fans taking part in the event by gradually falling back on a set of more or less instituted roles, allowing them to temporarily become part of the city (tourists, event spectators, consumers). This work of governing behaviours had to allow fans to be integrated into the city’s order to fulfil the promises of the event (commercial gains, the city’s reputation, sporting and festive pleasure) and at the same time contain menaces (problems of law and order, financial losses, a portion of the population’s dissatisfaction, etc.). As already instated during the 2006 World Cup in Germany, each of the 2008 European Cup’s host-cities had one or several Public Viewing Areas, defined by Heferberg, Golka and Selter as “an installation offering a televised transmission of a live major sporting event, with enough space to welcome a large number of spectators” (Heferburg, Golka and Selter, 2009, p. 174). The Fan Zone set up during the 2008 Euro in Geneva, comprised of two distinct areas, notably had two giant screen (each measuring 60 m<sup>2</sup>), a VIP space, a space reserved for the press, 40 bars and restaurants, a mini-football field, and a stage hosting five musical events outside the football matches. The double-bind mentioned earlier (creating an event that is both safe *and* festive) is perfectly illustrated by the characteristics of the Plainpalais Fan Zone, a space set up to resemble most European football stadiums (Bale, 1993), with an enclosed area, pat-down at the entrances, the confiscation of dangerous objects (including umbrellas and breakable bottles), and the presence of plain-clothed police “spotters” inside the space. At the same time access to the Fan Zone was free of charge and open to everyone, with entry possible starting the early afternoon and until the end of the evening after the matches. Individuals were allowed to move freely within the space, and to either watch the match seated on the terrace of one of the food stands or standing in front of a screen while sipping a beer (with alcohol).

## **3. The “friendly” fan: the anticipated supporter at the event**

For the organizers of the 2008 Euro in Geneva, the desire to promote an event that was both safe and festive lent itself to the creation of a prototype image of the ideal fan-type, whose behaviour would appropriately correspond with the space. This became known as the “friendly” fan—the fan who, above all, is a fan, and who shows allegiance to his team and

interprets his role in a light-hearted manner, both in terms of his attitude and his equipment. Taking the example of Dutch supporters, a head of security for the 2008 Euro described them this way: “They’re all dressed in these big balls, with 12-meter long hats and bright orange and orange jerseys—but it’s pure joy”. This caricature highlights the definition of the “friendly” fan—one that participates in the event in a festive way and shows enthusiasm and support for the project, thus evoking a natural benevolence. But where is this fan in reality? Is the friendly fan the antithesis of the hooligan, the emblem of the unwelcome supporter whose presence is feared? The ambivalence of an event that is at once safe *and* festive has polarized expectations of supporter types to two extremes: on the one hand, the friendly fan, and the hooligan on the other. By taking a closer look at acts of fan support—acts of fan support, fundamentally indexed to the concrete circumstances of their realization, resulting above all, as we will see, from a mix of intentionality and a framework of action (Goffman, 1991)—in practice through several accounts of observation, we were able to sketch a profile of the 2008 Euro supporter that falls *outside* of both of these categories.

### III. The feat of being a fan

#### 1. Times and locations of displays of fan support

The main pre-match ritual was unquestionably the gathering of fans on patios and inside bistros. Certain visitors nonetheless took advantage of the free time before the matches to wander around Geneva’s old city, or take a ride on the tourist train. Predominantly a tourism of famous sites (Debarieux, 1992), fans were mainly seen around the city’s main tourist areas, like the Saint-Pierre Cathedral and the Parc des Bastions. Nor was there any lack of alternatives to the Fan Zone for watching the matches (the giant screen in Fan Village and the televisions in many of the city’s bars and restaurants being among the choices). The Fan Zone, however, quickly established itself as *the* gathering place for fans not in possession of a stadium ticket, welcoming up to 40,000 persons during the most important matches. During the match the spectators’ movement inside the Fan Zone was limited; movement in and out of the space was also condensed in a very short period of time right before and after the matches. Supporters generally arrived at the last minute (thus impinging on the first moments of the matches), in part due to the pat down at the entrances. Potentially dangerous objects were to be dropped off lockers, which also held up the flow of spectators. Exit from the Fan Zone was more homogenous, as a majority of the spectators left the space directly following the blow of the final whistle. The organizers had undoubtedly anticipated such a rapid exit movement because, during several instances of particular affluence, two sections of the portal located next to the main entrance were left open to speed up evacuation and avoid people jams.

Once outside of the Fan Zone, supporters went in search of greater publicity, desirous to manifest their joy and pride to the city at large—a territory enlarged to an even greater extent by the news media’s presence at the event. Remaining inside a space that was physically separated by fences from the rest of the city (and symbolically from the rest of the world) did not suit them. Because of its proximity to the main entrance of the Fan Zone and its physical characteristics (including its location, at the crossroads of the main tramway lines), the Plainpalais roundabout was the first space to be “occupied” by fans, who often blocked traffic for several minutes at a time. Gatherings at this site were often followed by a parade of cars celebrating a team’s victory, which all those who had seen the match, either in public or at home, could partake in. Fans occupied these spaces and manifested their joy with the help of flags and horns, not to mention songs glorifying the exploits of their teams. Car and scooters, with horns honking and flags waving, tirelessly circled the Rive roundabout, as often seen on such occasions. At the Place Neuve some fans even threw themselves into the

fountain, while others scaled the statuary to hang flags from its heights. This phenomenon of spatial conquest has also been observed by Bromberger (1995) and Signorelli (1994) in the Italian context. The latter author most notably highlighted that the night A.C. Napoli brought home the Italian championship title for the first time in its history in 1987, “the urban territory became a central and integral component of the celebration” and that “all the symbolic value of the urban space was brought out”. So was it observed in Geneva: “Pedestrians took the place of cars and cars the place of pedestrians; the statuary on monuments and fountains were painted, and draped with players’ uniforms” (Signorelli, 1994, p. 619).

## **2. Fan support in motion**

Acts of fan support, resulting from the meeting of a fan with a framework of action, cannot be separated from the context in which they take place. Thus is it important to not overlook material artefacts and the effect they have on actors’ (in this case, fans) behaviour in the public space. Consequently, both the practical translation of security devices in public spaces and the way they limit the field of possibilities have an impact on the likelihood of encounters as well as on the spaces in which they take place, the way fans appropriate the city, etc. Thus, to better understand acts of fan support, it is essential to look closely at the context in which they happen. For example, the choice of heading towards urban intersections is without a doubt not entirely random. Reviving the theories of Kevin Lynch, who explored inhabitants’ perception of their own city, (1977), let us say that fans see urban hubs (which the Plainpalais and Rive roundabouts and Place Neuve are) as key components of a city. Consequently, we can imagine that in their quest for publicity, fans are looking to head towards a place where publicity is strengthened by the passage of buses, trams, cars, bikes, and pedestrians. More than mere urban hubs, the Rive roundabout and Place Neuve have specificities, or footholds, (Bessy, Chateauraynaud, 1995) that fans are destined to put into use. The Rive roundabout’s large circumference allows numerous cars to circle at the same time; its wide sidewalks offer fans a place to gather in support or take part in the parade. The fountain at the Place Neuve invites fans to take a dip, while the nearby statue of General Dufour, because of its impressive height, invites fans to scale its summit to hang flags as a sign of victory.

As an outdoor sporting event, the 2008 Euro can be described as changeable. The outcome of matches in conjunction with weather conditions had a considerable impact on team support. Thus, the number of spectators at the Fan Zone depended to a great extent on weather conditions. The cool temperatures and consequent rainfall during the first week of the competition were responsible for weak turnout at the site and did not encourage post-match gatherings. By contrast, the fine weather during the second half of the competition undoubtedly contributed to prolonged outdoor celebrating in the city streets. The interplay between fans and the field of possibilities offered by the urban footholds they carved out for themselves in Geneva sparked off swings, such as the movement of Spanish supporters toward the Place Neuve following the team’s victory in the final match.

The particularity of this dedicated movement stems from the fact that it was completely unexpected. However, the elements that allow us to give meaning to this redeployment of Spanish supporters to the Place Neuve following the final victory are both numerous and contingent. Following the Spanish victory in final (hazard), fans quickly left the Fan Zone to access the greater public space (to be supported). Because of its physical characteristics, the Place Neuve lent itself particularly well to the interpretation of the fan repertoire: it is an urban hub boasting a fountain filled with water and statuary, offering numerous points of reference for supporters (urban footholds). Finally, it is clear that climatic conditions were particularly favourable for swimming (hazard).

## Conclusion

The need to create an event in Geneva that responded to security imperatives and at the same time guaranteed a festive ambiance gave birth to a welcoming device geared at ambivalent supporters: the Fan Zone. Because of its characteristics, the Public Viewing Area at Plainpalais embodied a space of constraints (enclosed premises, pat-down, ban on certain items at the entrances, limited choice of alcoholic beverages) but also of freedom (free of charge, the possibility of free movement within the location, a choice of alcoholic beverages, etc.). The conception of these reception facilities and the devices for preventing dangerous behaviour were both based on anticipated supporter behaviour. Our observations, however, allowed us to highlight the gap between these expectations and the reality of what went on. Team support proved to be much more complex we initially believed, resulting, as we have shown, in a subtle mixture of the supporter and his accomplishment in combination with a context (Garfinkel, 1967).

To summarize, large-scale events, while awaited and pre-planned, nonetheless give rise to their fair share of expectations, emotions, and anxieties, which in turn shape the events to come. These expectations in the end seem contribute to the ontology of the event, which, as it is a planned event, establishes its practical accomplishment in the form of overflow. For the event to be a *true* event, for it not to lose its quality as an event and for the devices that help contain it *not* to spoil it, it is undoubtedly normal that the event, once it has happened, overflow the apparatus of its own accomplishment (Peroni, 2002). This apparatus, whose purpose it is to organize human and non-human elements, incorporating both the plurality of audiences and structural layout alike, should then be considered in its paradoxes and ambivalence as well; thus, it is likewise its purpose to be overwhelmed. This image of overflow is a theme that seems relevant to mobilize in order to ultimately qualify what the 2008 Euro did to the city of Geneva, both practically (in terms of a practical framework and the excesses that ruin the celebration) as well as in the spatial sense of a physical overflow – an event space that is overcome, overwhelmed, and, more importantly, enlarged by the practices of its users. The territory of the large-scale event is therefore neither given nor fixed, but rather is sculpted through the acts of its users, *including* the overflow, these excesses of emotions which, then, when reported on by the media, will serve to reinforce the event *as* an event.

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